

Governor Brian Schweitzer
Office of the Governor
Montana State Capitol Bldg.
P.O. Box 200801
Helena MT 59620-0801

November 21, 2005

Dear Governor Schweitzer,

Thank you for meeting with the Gallatin County Commissioners in September and requesting our input on Montana's National Forest Roadless areas petition. Our constituents care deeply about these lands, and we appreciate your desire to involve us in this process.

When we met, you asked that we identify any new federal road, from "point A to point B," that we may feel should be constructed into current inventoried National Forest roadless lands in Gallatin County. You also asked that we submit an analysis with any road proposal that details the economic costs of construction and maintenance of the new road and the environmental impacts of the proposed road. We appreciate the clarity of your request and will respond with similar clarity.

The Gallatin County Commission does not, generally, believe any new roads need to be built into these inventoried roadless areas. The following exceptions may be necessary:

- A road may be necessary for fuel load reduction so as to manage the threat of catastrophic wildfire that threatens watersheds, life or property;
- A road realignment is necessary to fix an existing road that is causing resource damage or has deteriorated to the point of being hazardous, or
- There are existing legal rights of way to private inholdings.

We would like the Governor's petition regarding National Forest roadless areas to include the request to leave Gallatin County's designated roadless areas as they are today for our residents and visitors to enjoy. This map or letter should not be interpreted as support for, or opposition to, future decisions regarding the management of existing roads and trails in inventoried roadless areas or possible future congressional designation of wilderness.

After your visit, the Gallatin County Commission conducted a public hearing regarding National Forest roadless lands. We have also been participating in ongoing Gallatin Forest travel management discussions. Throughout all of these efforts, we hear from many of our constituents who recreate on National Forest lands, whether by OHV, mountain bike, snowmobile, foot or horseback. Diverse interests in Gallatin County are in agreement on one issue: new roads into currently inventoried roadless forest lands are not necessary at this time.

New road building into inventoried roadless areas is unnecessary because:

- There are existing roads on the Gallatin Forest that are in need of maintenance but the Forest Service lacks adequate funds and manpower to accomplish this. As County Commissioners, we know how expensive roads are. We believe it defies common sense to build more roads when the Forest Service is not meeting obligations to properly maintain the existing forest road and trail infrastructure.
- Noxious and invasive weeds that are associated with new road construction is an issue that is very familiar to county government. Fighting weeds once they get established is a difficult and expensive process. Preventing new road building in currently inventoried roadless areas will reduce the likelihood that weeds spread into these areas of high quality native habitat.
- We are blessed in Gallatin County with a vibrant, diverse and growing economy due in no small part to our breathtaking natural landscape and the world class recreational opportunities offered by our public lands. Roadless areas play a vital role in sustaining the high quality of life and prosperity that Gallatin County residents currently enjoy.

Again, we thank you for your leadership on this issue and appreciate your request for our input. We hope you will support Gallatin County's request that no new roads be built in currently inventoried roadless areas in our county as part of Montana's roadless petition.

Sincerely,

Gallatin County Commission
Bill Murdock, Joe Skinner and John Vincent